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SERVICE

USDA'S REPORT TO CONSUMERS

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WHAT'S AHEAD

The Food Situation. Some retail food prices may again increase in 1966, say economists at the U. S. Department of Agriculture, but not as much as this year. And, because most people will be earning more money, they'll actually be spending less of their take-home pay for food in 1966 than in 1965.

Supplies of meat have been reduced and prices for beef, pork, lamb and mutton probably will go up. At the same time, however, there'll be lots of potatoes; potato prices will drop considerably. And the price of citrus and poultry also will be less than average. Look for lower prices on frozen corn, peas, and snap beans, but higher prices of most canned vegetables -- except beans, peas and sauerkraut. Canned peaches, pears, sweet cherries and fruit cocktail are already costing a bit more and prices will continue at these levels until mid-1966. The price of frozen strawberries -- and possibly peaches -- will also be up a little. Fresh grapes will cost less; cranberry prices will be about the same; fresh apples and pears, the same or up slightly. Milk prices will change little; the price of ice cream will be down again in '66; the price of butter and cheese slightly higher.

Home Furnishings. You'll find higher price tags on home appliances during 1966, but you'll also get more product for your money, reports Ethel D. Hoover of the Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics. Speaking at the 1966 USDA Outlook Conference, Mrs. Hoover predicted greater use of appliances in the home, a large number of replacements, and an expanded market for such luxury items as color TV's, radios and portable phonographs. Consumers also will find a 3 to 5 percent increase in the price of upholstered goods next year, Mrs. Hoover said, but little change in floor covering prices. Carpets of man-made fibers will be down a little in price; wool products up slightly. Hard surface floor coverings -- linoleum, asphalt and vinyl -- also will cost a little more in '66.

Clothing. Price advances are expected in the next few months in certain apparel items. Increases in shoe prices may appear with the spring lines in December-February. Prices may be 50 cents to \$1 a pair higher for low and medium-priced shoes; as much as \$2 for some higher-priced shoes. And expect a 5 to 10 percent rise in the price of children's clothing this spring.



Look, too, for more easy-care items on the clothes racks -- more permanently pressed garments, especially men's and boys' slacks, and a permanent-press shirt that the manufacturer claims never needs the touch of an iron. Look for more stretch cottons, especially for sports clothes; more shrink-resistant woolen garments that may be laundered at home in the washing machine -- both products of USDA research.

Leather shoes will continue to be popular -- boots, loafers and casuals; but expect fewer patent leathers.

Housing. The demand for housing will not increase until 1967-68 when the bumper crop of babies born just after World War II will be marrying and looking for a place to live. Right now, the situation is somewhat static. Construction will continue next year at about the same rate as this. And, as in the past, higher incomes mean higher housing costs. But included with the price of a place to live now come many extras -- more space, more fixtures, more yard, and often use of a community swim pool and tennis court. Yesterday's luxuries are becoming today's necessities. But while the trend in housing costs continues upward, families on a pension or a fixed or low income continue to be priced out of the market.

FOR YOUR PROTECTION

Tighten Meat Regulations. To assure consumers of an even safer supply of imported meat and meat products, the U. S. Department of Agriculture now requires overseas plants shipping meat to American markets to place their identification number on the bulk container, the individual package, and on the meat itself if this is practicable. This will aid in tracing the meat to its origin even after it has been distributed throughout the U. S. It will strengthen the already rigid regulations which require importers to meet the same exacting standards of sanitation and wholesomeness as U. S. meat packers and processors.

Insecticides in Time Capsules. It sounds like something out of Buck Rogers. It's not. It's here today -- time capsules that release bacterial spores to combat destructive crop pests. U. S. Department of Agriculture entomologists have tested these capsules in the control of European corn borers -- and they work. The scientists ~~now are~~ looking forward to trying the same technique with insecticides. Coatings can be formulated so the capsules, applied at planting time, release the insecticide at various times throughout the growing season. This, the scientists say, would help protect pollinating insects and other organisms that otherwise might be exposed to insecticides applied as liquid or dust. Adaptation of the capsule method is part of the Department's large-scale effort to develop more efficient pest control techniques.

SCIENTISTS AT WORK

"Soda Pop" Sprays. A plant sprayed with carbonated water will grow faster than one that gets plain water, say U. S. Department of Agriculture scientists. Chrysanthemums sprayed with carbonated water had blooms ready to cut 14 days earlier than untreated plants. Leaf lettuce given the carbonated water treatment produced 3 times as much marketable leaf in 6 weeks as lettuce plants sprayed with plain water.

Inside Report. Ever wish you could peek into an apple or potato to see if it's as good inside as out? It's now possible. The U. S. Department of Agriculture has such a gadget, and it could revolutionize the produce industry. The machine, called a difference meter because it can tell the difference between good and bad internal quality, casts a light beam through the produce. The amount of light that passes through indicates how sound the product is. Attached to a processing or packaging line, the difference meter could instantly spot bad fruits or vegetables and toss them off the line. It can also measure the ripeness of apples, cherries, oranges, peaches, peanuts and tomatoes.

NEW FOODS

Apple Flakes. They're applesauce, squeezed between rollers, heated, dried, dehumidified and crushed -- another new product of USDA research. And what do you do with the flakes? Make applesauce, of course. Or, they can be used in cake mixes and confections, or mixed with cold dry cereals. Their uses are many; their convenience obvious. The flakes have good apple flavor, ship light and easy, and take up little space on the cupboard shelf. Although not yet on the market, you probably will be seeing them soon.

Instant Grapefruit Juice. You get double convenience in grapefruit crystals, the latest product to come out of the U. S. Department of Agriculture's research labs. The crystals are easy to use and easy to store. And they're now ready for commercial production. One of a long line of foam-mat dried foods, grapefruit crystals come from another USDA-developed convenience food, frozen grapefruit concentrate. Shoppers will buy them in handy plastic pouches that take up little space and require no refrigeration -- a quick and easy source of vitamin C.

NUTRITION NEWS

Search for Protein. The search is on -- to find new food-protein sources for people who live in areas where meat, milk and eggs are in short supply. U. S. Department of Agriculture scientists are seeking ways to utilize flours prepared from locally grown cereals in the native foods of hungry Nations. They've already come up with several: A peanut flour wafer ideal for youngsters; a beverage containing soy flour for babies and small children who no longer receive mother's milk; and a vegetable stew thickened with oil-seed flour for added protein. But most important, they have created a new baby food -- a soft porridge-like food made from special flours to replace cassava, a starchy food with little nutritional value now fed to babies in many countries. Use of oil-seed flours for this purpose could mean the difference between sickness and health -- in some cases, life or death -- for these babies.

Which Whey? Your youngsters may soon be emulating Miss Muffet eating her curds and whey. But the whey they eat will be in fruit-ice lollipops in four delicious flavors -- strawberry, orange, lemon and lime. Scientists at the U. S. Department of Agriculture find they can substitute cottage cheese whey for a sixth of the sugar used in ices-on-a-stick. Tasters who have sampled the new ice-pops say they're every bit as good as conventional frozen ices. Some even preferred those made the new way. You'll like them too -- because they will provide your youngsters with more protein and fewer empty calories.

NEW BOOKLETS

A Guide to Budgeting. Know what you need and what you want -- now, in the next 5 years, the next 10 or 20. Then budget to save for it. That's the suggestion of U. S. Department of Agriculture consumer specialists who recently published a new booklet on budgeting. In the publication are step-by-step instructions on how to set up and use a budget. A table of installment credit rates gives readers a quick comparison of various types of loans offered by various types of lenders. For a free copy address a postcard including your ZIP code to: Office of Information, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., 20250. Ask for HG-108, "A Guide to Budgeting for the Family."

"Food Costs." Why do food costs go up? A new booklet, recently revised by the Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service, tells you where your grocery dollar goes. However, it also points out that while the price of food has risen, so too have wages. A year's income or an hour's work now buys more food and marketing services than ever before. If you've been complaining about the size of your grocery bill or are simply curious about the story behind food costs, send for a copy of this easy-to-understand pamphlet. Ask for "Food Costs," MP-856. Send your request on a postcard to the Office of Information, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., 20250.

SHOPPING TIPS

Pick the Plentifuls. To make the most of your grocery money, buy foods in plentiful supply. During December, the featured item on the U. S. Department of Agriculture's List of Plentiful Foods is pecans. A near-record crop of over 260 million pounds is expected. Also in good supply this month will be apples, onions, cabbage, fresh oranges and frozen orange juice, broiler-fryers, turkeys, peanuts, peanut butter, peanut candies and peanut oil.

COMMUNITY PROJECT

Cake and Credit. It started as a credit union and it still is -- in about 30 Louisiana communities. But, in addition, the Southern Consumer's Cooperative makes and sells fruit cakes. It also shells and markets pecans and makes pralines for commercial sale. The co-op went into the fruit cake business in 1964, as a means of finding jobs for low-income rural families and using some of the locally grown products. It was among the first to obtain a loan under the Economic Opportunity Act. Aid in organizing the business and applying for the loan came from the U. S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Community Development Service. Last year, Southern Consumers did a \$10,000 business in fruit cakes. This year it expects a five-fold increase -- plus good sales from pecans and pralines.

SERVICE is a monthly newsletter of consumer interest. It is designed for those who report to the individual consumer rather than for mass distribution. For information about items in this issue, write: Jeanne S. Park, Editor, SERVICE, Office of Information, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., 20250.